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ABSTRACT

A Finnish study compared the career development, participation in vocational education, and working life 4 to 5 years after the completion of secondary school education of students with mild mental retardation (n=13) and students with other disabilities (n=72). Results found most of the subjects had completed their studies, however, only 25 percent were working and nearly half (45 percent) were unemployed. Subjects with multiple problems were more often employed, some of them in sheltered workshops. Subjects with only lenient neuropsychological problems, however, had suffered most from general unemployment. The situation of the subjects with mild mental retardation was better, with about half of them working (in sheltered workshops or in open labor markets). All of the subjects with mild mental retardation who were outside the labor market had severe mental health problems. Subjects with mental health problems were also found to have stagnated career lines. Overall, the situation of students with mild mental retardation was found to be quite moderate compared to some other special education pupils, who were more often unemployed and who had no pensions, no sheltered workshops, or no other support systems. Materials are provided in overhead presentation format and include data graphs. (CR)

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CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG ADULTS WITH MILD MENTAL RETARDATION

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INTRODUCTION

For most young people the transition from school to adult life signifies a new life. However, it may be particularly difficult for adolescents with mental retardation, learning difficulties or other disabilities.

The aim of the study was to follow up the career development of special education pupils, for instance participation in vocational education and working life 4-5 years after the completion of their secondary school education. The pupils had been placed in special education because of their cognitive difficulties in learning or borderline intellectual level.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

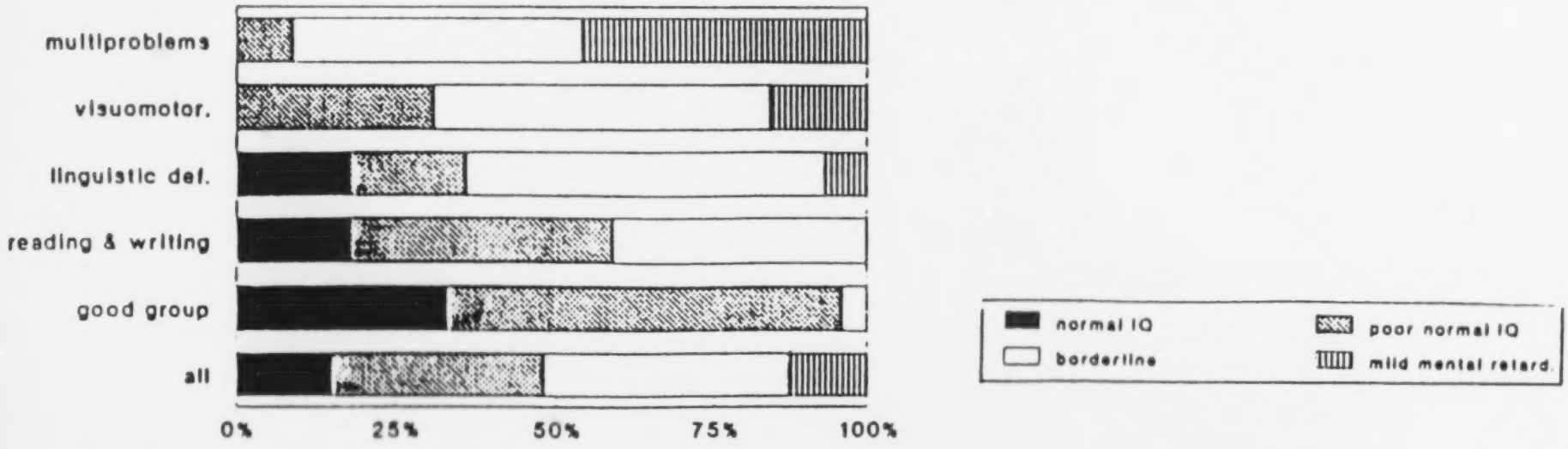
The subjects of the study (n=114) were special education pupils from the Helsinki Metropolitan area who had participated in a rehabilitation assessment during their 8th grade. The rehabilitation assessment consisted of medical, neurological, neuropsychological and social examinations, and was supplemented with questionnaire data gathered from parents and teachers as well as data from health records. Data of the follow-up was gathered mainly with interviews. Altogether 85 Ss

(75% of the original sample) took part in the follow-up. Thirteen of them were intellectually mildly mentally retarded (9 girls and 4 boys), which are the main subjects of this poster. At the follow-up, the Ss were from 19 to 23 years old.

RESULTS

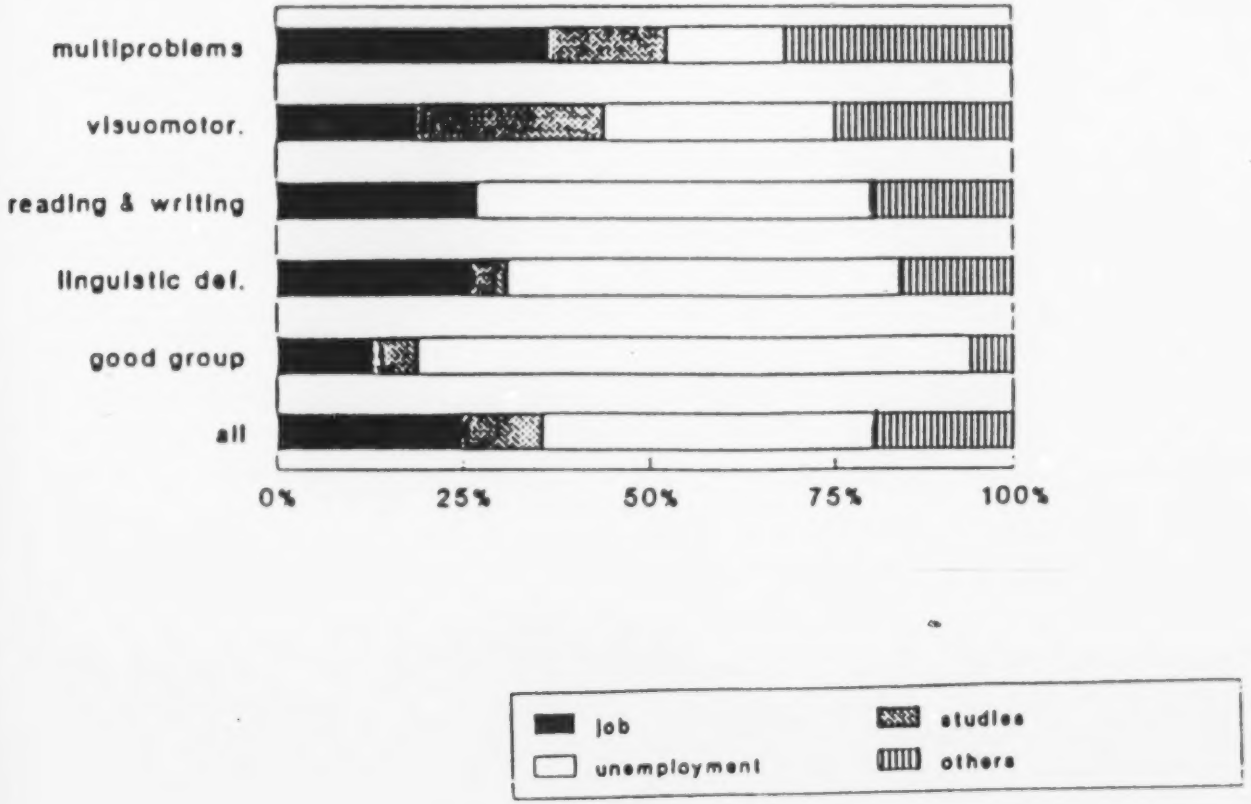
Description of the subjects. About two thirds (68%) of the pupils were boys. The pupils` intellectual level ranged from normal (48%) to borderline (39%) and slightly mentally retarded (13%). Neurologically, 44% of the pupils were normal, 16% were clumsy and the rest of them had single (23%) or several (17%) abnormal neurological findings. Five subgroups were formed by cluster analysis of the neuropsychological variables, i.e. those with multiple problems (19%), visuo-motor deficits (17%), reading and writing difficulties (15%), linguistic deficiencies (25%) and good resources (24%). The Ss with mild mental retardation belonged mostly to the subgroups of multiproblems or visuomotor deficits (Fig. 1). Neurological deviations were most frequent (85%) also in these two subgroups.

Fig. 1. The intellectual level of the Ss among the subgroups during their 8th grade (%) (N=114).



The life situation at the follow-up. The follow-up study was carried out during economic recession in Finland, which had affected the life situation of the Ss (Fig.2).

Fig. 2. The life situation of the ss at the follow-up among the subgroups (%) (N=85).



Most of the subjects had completed their studies; only 11% were still at school. However, only 25% were working and nearly half (45%) of the Ss were unemployed. In addition, 20% of the Ss were outside the labour market due to, e.g. military service, pension or maternity leave. Surprisingly, Ss with multiple problems were more often employed - some of them in sheltered workshops. On the other hand, Ss with only lenient neuropsychological problems, the so called good group, had suffered most from general unemployment.

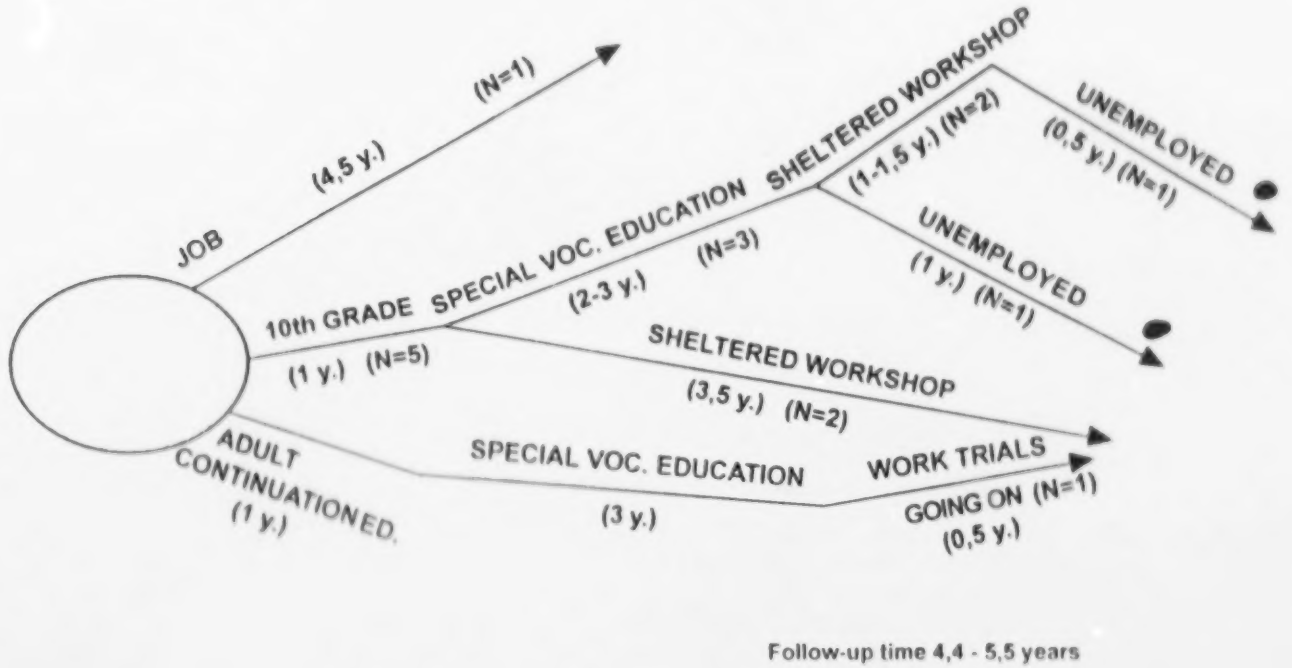
The situation of the subjects with mild mental retardation seemed to be better; about half of them was working - in sheltered workshops or in open labour markets at the follow-up time. One Ss was studying, a few were unemployed and a few outside the labour market. All of those outside the labour market had severe mental health problems.

Vocational education. Approximately half of the Ss (47%) had completed their vocational education and 5% were still continuing their studies, 19% had dropped their vocational education and 29% had not started vocational studies at all. However, some of them had studied some preparatory courses. The subjects with mild mental retardation had more seldom studied in vocational schools; a slightly more

than one third (38%) of them had completed their vocational education, one third had preparatory courses and one third (31%) had not started to study at all.

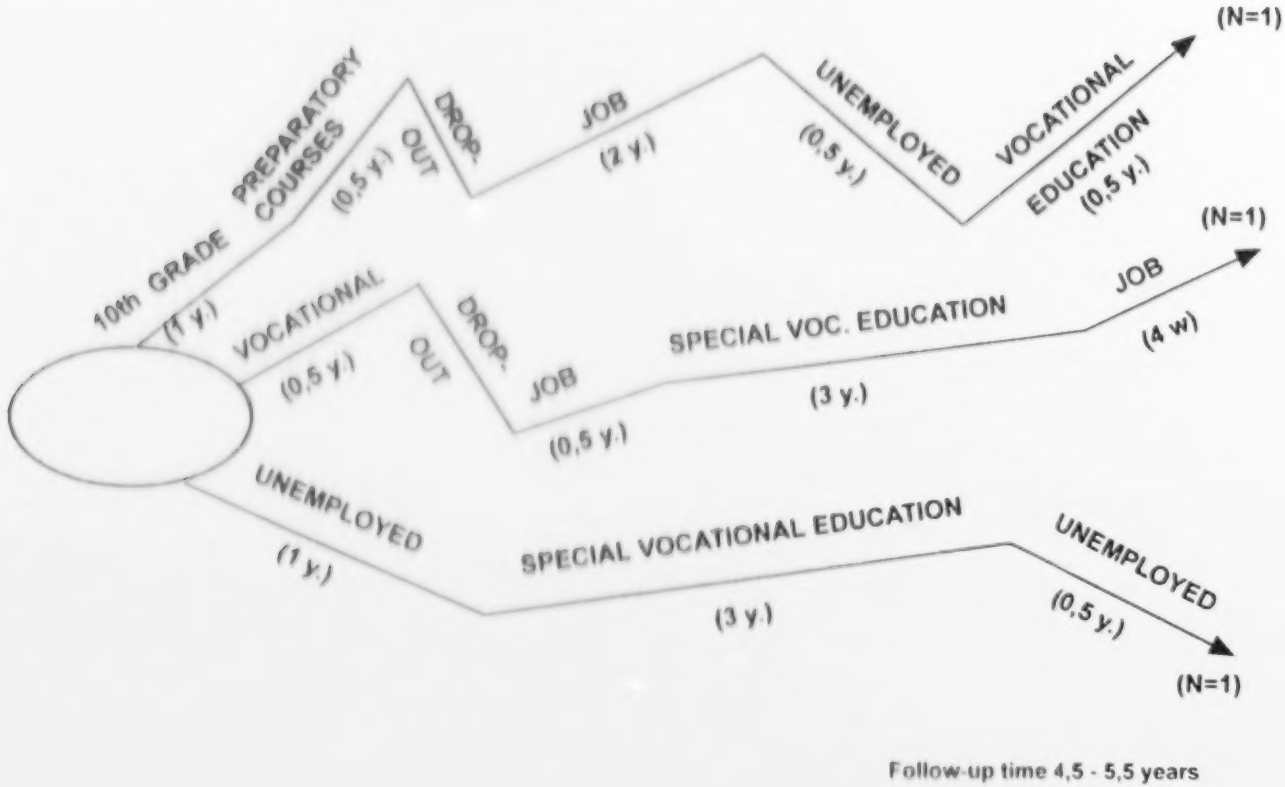
Career development. The educational and working career lines were determined on the bases of the whole follow-up time. The Ss in stable careers have studied or worked nearly the whole follow-up time. Those in unstable career have had more trials and dropouts in education or in working life. Those in stagnated careers had not managed to study or work at all. Seven of the Ss with mild mental retardation (N=13) were classified into the combined stable educational and working career line, three into unstable and three into stagnated careers. The career lines of the individuals are described in Figs 3 -5.

Fig.3. The stable career lines. 5 Ss were girls, 2 boys, (N=7). Ss marked with have become unemployed during the economic recession.



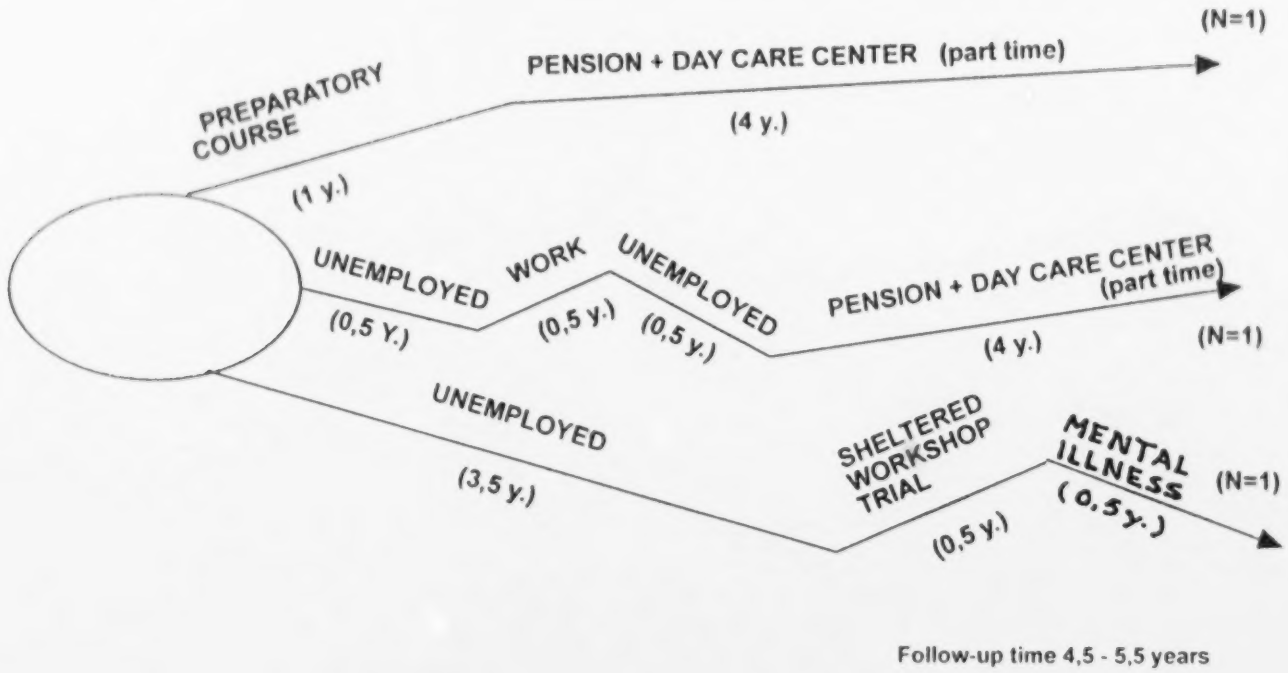
The most common pathway in the stable career was to start with extra 10th grade and to continue to special vocational education and to sheltered workshops with or without vocational education.

Fig.4. The unstable career lines. All Ss were girls (N=3).



The Ss in the unstable career have had difficulties especially in the beginning of their career; they had dropped out their studies or had been unemplyed. However, later on they had tried to continue their studies.

Fig.5. The stagnated career lines. 2 Ss were boys, 1 girl (N=3). All Ss had severe mental health problems. One pupil had dropped out the secondary school.



The Ss in the stagnated career had not started vocational education at all. Except 0,5 -1 years trials in the preparatory course or in work they have been unemployed or in day care centers (part time).

CONCLUSION

Many factors together, like economic recession, socio-economic status and problems of the family, education of parents and neurological, cognitive and psychosocial resources are important to the education and career development of the pupils coming from the special education.

The Ss - the special education pupils - had suffered from general unemployment more than their peers from normal schools. Surprisingly, the Ss with multiple cognitive problems or with mild mental retardation were more often employed. May be, the opportunity to get a job from a sheltered workshop makes the situation understandable. Because of economic recession during the follow-up everybody had difficulties to get a job.

Mental health seems to be important for career development; all of those in the stagnated career lines had severe mental health problems.

The situation of Ss with mild mental retardation seems to be quite moderate if compared to some other special education pupils, who were more often unemployed and who had no pensions, no sheltered workshops or no other support systems.